

DAILY BULLETIN

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FEW WEEKS REMAIN FOR SUCCESS IN WTO NEGOTIATIONS, OFFICIAL SAYS

USTR's Portman in Geneva reiterates need for better offers to cut tariffs..... 1

BUSH ADMINISTRATION REFINES PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

300 government actions outlined; individual responsibility emphasized..... 2

SUDANESE GOVERNMENT, REBELS HOLD KEY TO PEACE IN DARFUR

Deputy Secretary Zoellick in Abuja, Nigeria, promoting peace in Sudan 4

STATE'S FRIED SAYS NATO NOT "COUNTERWEIGHT TO UNITED NATIONS

Assistant secretary also says Europe-U.S. drawing closer on issues 5

FEW WEEKS REMAIN FOR SUCCESS IN WTO NEGOTIATIONS, OFFICIAL SAYS

USTR's Portman in Geneva reiterates need for better offers to cut tariffs

By Bruce Odessey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman has indicated that any chance of success for the long-stalled World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations will become clear in the weeks ahead.

"Ultimately the gains will come from liberalizing trade, from opening markets and knocking down barriers," Portman said in Geneva May 3. "We need to move back to that fundamental truth, and I think this next four to six weeks will be the moment of truth."

Portman leads a U.S. delegation to WTO headquarters in Geneva where participants missed the April 30 deadline for agreeing on modalities, or specific formulas and deadlines, to cut agricultural and industrial tariffs and government payments to farmers.

After the delegation met over two days with representatives from about 90 of the 149 WTO member economies, Portman briefed reporters in Geneva, where his comments were carried to Washington by teleconference.

He said the United States remains committed to successful conclusion of the negotiations, formally called the Doha Development Agenda.

Portman has been pressing the European Union (EU) and other wealthy countries to embrace deep cuts in agricultural tariffs as the United States proposed in October. He also has been pressing rapidly growing emerging economies to accept deep cuts in industrial tariffs and to open their markets to services.

“It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that, unless there is a more ambitious result in market access than is currently on the table from other countries, that there is not going to be a successful round,” Portman said.

The Doha round has been stalled almost since it was launched in 2001 over the politically divisive market-access issues, especially agriculture.

In its October 2005 agriculture proposal, the United States offered deep cuts in the most trade-distorting kind of government payments to farmers, a category the WTO calls the amber box. It also proposed cutting the less trade-distorting payments tied to limiting production, called the blue box.

For the blue box, the United States proposed limiting payments in any country to 2.5 percent of the value of production, half the 5 percent limit already embraced by WTO members in 2004.

Portman said the United States remains willing to rework its blue box proposal to prevent concentration of those payments for any single crop.

The Geneva trip could be the last one for Portman as trade representative because he expects Senate confirmation in a few weeks for his nomination to become the White House budget director. Accompanying him in Geneva were Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab, who has been nominated to succeed Portman.

An audio file of Portman’s briefing is available on the U.S. Mission homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

For additional information, see USA and the WTO: http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/WTO.html

BUSH ADMINISTRATION REFINES PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

300 government actions outlined; individual responsibility emphasized

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – The Bush administration unveiled a far-reaching plan May 3, directing federal government agencies to take more than 300 actions to prepare for an outbreak of pandemic influenza.

As Homeland Security Adviser Frances Townsend presented the package to the media at a White House briefing, she emphasized that the occurrence of a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in nations across Asia, Europe and Africa does not constitute a human pandemic of disease. Nor, she said, can reliable predictions be made about whether a pandemic is imminent, or when it could occur. Nonetheless, government, businesses, schools, families and individuals need to recognize the possibility and prepare, she said.

“We should understand and prepare for the worst-case scenario,” Townsend said.

The plan demands that federal agencies take some very specific actions, regarding the safety and protection of employees in the event of pandemic. It also requires them to develop a plan for maintaining essential operations at a time when high numbers of employees could be absent due to their own illness or that of a family member. The White House also is ordering government agencies to draw up a communications plan to explain their operations in a time of crisis.

That is the governmental plan, but Townsend said the potential consequences of pandemic illness – potentially millions of people sick -- are so vast that everybody needs to be prepared.

“This means that individual actions are perhaps the most important element of our preparedness and response activities,” Townsend said. The homeland security expert said the plan will rely on individuals exercising some common sense if illness begins to take hold in their towns – avoiding trips to shopping malls or canceling vacations, for instance.

In a federal system, in which the U.S. Constitution reserves certain powers and responsibilities to state and local authorities, the national government is limited in how it can direct other entities to prepare or respond to any event, including pandemic illness. Federal authorities have been reaching out to state and local organizations – public and private – with dozens of meetings to underscore the threat of pandemic and urge the adoption of local preparedness plans.

Those meetings have been held in cities across the country since the overarching national pandemic strategy was first announced in November 2005.

STOPPING A PANDEMIC

The national flu pandemic response plan includes a key international element because the outbreak of disease within the United States likely will depend on whether the animal disease has mutated into a human disease in another country. Townsend said the United States is committed to action wherever that may happen.

“The key elements of an international response effort include, first, agreed epidemiological triggers for international response and containment, the rapid, transparent reporting and sharing of samples, rapid response teams, stockpiles of countermeasures and logistical support for an international response,” she said.

The United States already has committed more than \$330 million to the international effort to contain the disease at the first human outbreak. “Minimizing the opportunities for the virus to mutate and helping other nations to prepare should a pandemic virus emerge is a global responsibility and is also the first line of defense for the United States,” she said.

President Bush announced the launch of the international partnerships in September 2005 at the United Nations to heighten awareness of the threat and to work to establish resources for international containment. Donor governments have pledged about \$2 billion to that effort so far.

Questioned about whether the United States would close its borders if human pandemic illness broke out overseas, Townsend said the action probably would be ineffective and impractical, given the substantial movement of people, goods and commerce across U.S. borders every day.

“There’s a period of time very early on in a potential

pandemic where that may be effective, not in stopping the arrival of the virus, but in buying us time in slowing the spread of the pandemic,” Townsend said. “We look at things like departure screening, on-plane screening and arrival screening.”

Decisions about border screening and restrictions on cross-border travel would be made in consultation with international partners, Townsend said.

The new implementation strategy does not address the distribution of vaccine and anti-viral drugs in the event of disease outbreak, Townsend said, because those are decisions that cannot be made in a hypothetical way.

Reporters questioned Townsend with a number of “what ifs” that she turned aside, and instead pointed to some “remarkable performance and progress” that has been made in the last few months.

“One of the actions in the plan is to expand the Medical Reserve Corps, a community-based program of volunteer health and medical providers, by 20 percent: that meant from 350 to 450 chapters in 2006,” Townsend said. “That objective was placed in the draft plan early in 2006, and the Medical Reserve Corps has already achieved it.”

The Bush administration urged the Congress to earmark \$7 billion for national and international pandemic preparedness plans, but the lawmakers so far have approved just over half that amount. Townsend said the administration will continue to press Congress for increased spending in the current budget cycle and in years to come.

The White House also issued a fact sheet on the preparedness plan May 3:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060503-5.html>.

For further information, see the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan (PDF, 234 pages):

http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/nspi_implementation.pdf

The central source for U.S. government information on pandemic preparedness is [pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov):

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

For ongoing coverage of avian influenza and international efforts to combat it, see Bird Flu:

http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html

SUDANESE GOVERNMENT, REBELS HOLD KEY TO PEACE IN DARFUR

Deputy Secretary Zoellick in Abuja, Nigeria, promoting peace in Sudan

By Charles W. Corey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The government of Sudan and the Sudanese rebel leaders are faced with the decision of whether to embrace peace -- they are the ones who "hold the keys" to a solution to the crisis that grips Darfur, says State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. McCormack told reporters May 3 that the United States, under the close direction of Deputy Secretary of State Robert B. Zoellick, is working with other nations to bring the parties to an agreement at the Darfur peace talks under way in Abuja, Nigeria.

Those involved in the talks describe the atmosphere as one where the parties want to come to an agreement, McCormack said. Now it is a matter of "transferring that will, that desire into reality," the spokesman told reporters.

Zoellick already has held a number of meetings since arriving in Abuja, McCormack said. The deputy secretary has met with the Sudanese delegation and with African Union (AU) mediators, whom the spokesman praised for doing "terrific work" trying to bring the parties together.

Additionally, Zoellick has met with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is "deeply engaged" in the talks. Zoellick also might meet later with the chairman of the African Union Commission and former Malian President, Alpha Oumar Konare, according to McCormack.

Additionally, the spokesman said, a broad array of African leaders is now traveling to Abuja. "There is intense international interest to bring pressure to bear on the parties to come to an agreement," McCormack said. He again said the Sudanese government and rebels "are the ones that hold the keys" to an agreement.

Asked if Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made any telephone calls May 3 in regard to Sudan which would be similar to President Bush's call to Sudanese President Umar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir May 2, the spokesman said Rice stands "absolutely ready" to make whatever phone calls might be needed to help bring the Sudanese parties to an agreement.

When asked about the enforcement of any such agreement that might be reached in Abuja, the spokesman acknowledged that enforcement is "very important. The first step is getting to a piece of paper that outlines a common understanding," he said.

INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION HELPING TO FOCUS NEGOTIATIONS

Asked about intense international pressure now being brought to bear on the parties in Abuja, the spokesman said that international attention tends to focus the efforts and energies of those involved in the negotiations.

"Our hope is that the presence of the international community, including Deputy Secretary Zoellick and representatives of the AU, will have a positive effect. It is not pressure in the negative sense but in the positive sense of helping them come to an agreement, bridge their differences, offer suggestions. But ultimately, they are the ones that are going to have come to an agreement."

The spokesman called the attention from the international community at this stage in the talks a "positive sign ... so we would hope that if there is an agreement, that that level of interest and effort is reflected in the implementation of the agreement."

Asked if a special envoy should be named to Sudan as some members of Congress have suggested, the spokesman said the U.S. government has had a special envoy in the past.

"Right now Deputy Secretary Zoellick is really the point person in terms of the diplomacy on this issue. He is deeply involved in it," McCormack said.

Zoellick is working with a broad array of senior officials, he said, "so there is high level attention to this," in addition to a deep interest on the part of Secretary of State Rice and President Bush, who has had an interest in Sudan since the early days of his administration.

McCormack told reporters Zoellick will make the decision in consultation with Rice and Bush on what, if any, next steps need to be taken by the United States on the negotiations.

DARFUR REMAINS "HIGH PRIORITY" FOR PRESIDENT, WHITE HOUSE SAYS

White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters at the May 3 White House press briefing that the “deterioration and human suffering in Darfur have been a high priority” for the president.

He told reporters that during a telephone talk with President Bashir, Bush urged Bashir to accept the transition of an African Union mission to a United Nations peace-keeping mission in Darfur, to accept a NATO supportive role and to send Sudanese Vice President Taha back to the peace talks to help finalize a peace agreement.

Speaking to reporters May 3 at a press opportunity with the Japanese foreign minister in Washington, Rice said of the Abuja talks, “I hope the parties will take this opportunity to get a peace agreement and lay a foundation for which the violence can end and so that the people of Darfur can be safe and live in peace.”

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>

STATE’S FRIED SAYS NATO NOT “COUNTERWEIGHT TO UNITED NATIONS

Assistant secretary also says Europe-U.S. drawing closer on issues

By Vince Crawley
 Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The good news is that the United States and Europe are cooperating again; the bad news is that they are facing some of the world’s most dangerous, intractable problems, a senior U.S. diplomat says.

“Unilateralism is out. Effective multilateralism is in,” Daniel Fried, assistant secretary of state for European affairs, said May 2 at a national conference of editorial writers in Washington.

Fried said the United States and Europe are “working to make NATO the centerpiece alliance through which the trans-Atlantic democratic community deals with security challenges around the world.”

But NATO is not a “counterweight” to the larger United

Nations, Fried said. The international organizations are “compatible,” he said, adding that NATO is different from the United Nations because it is an alliance of “trans-Atlantic democracy, so it’s based on underlying values,” and it also is a proven military alliance able to put together and deploy capable forces for specific missions.

Fried acknowledged that European publics remain “skeptical about the Bush administration” but said European governments no longer seek to “strategically” differ with the United States by promoting a unified Europe as a counterweight to the American superpower.

“The differences we have with Europe are, frankly, trivial compared to the magnitude of the problems that await us both in the world, and this is now the view that European governments share,” Fried said.

The 26-nation NATO alliance has no ambitions for becoming a global organization, he said. “But it is a NATO capable and actually, in fact, dealing with global challenges,” Fried said.

In Iraq, “I don’t expect that you’re going to have NATO putting in a mass of ground forces,” Fried said. But many NATO countries are contributing on an individual basis to the Iraq coalition, and NATO is helping both by politically supporting Iraq’s new democratic government as well as helping to train the Iraqi military, he said.

KOSOVO NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE

In Kosovo, Fried restated the U.S. position that a political settlement to the province’s status is attainable in 2006. The Kosovo province of Serbia has been administered by the United Nations since 1999. Negotiations began in February to determine whether it will gain independence or be an autonomous part of Serbia.

“Serbia has to be offered a path to Europe” and “can’t be sort of hung out to dry as a pariah,” Fried said. Human rights abuses against Kosovo in the 1990s were carried out under the government of Slobodan Milosevic, who died in March while standing trial in The Hague, Netherlands, for war crimes. “There’s a democratic government in Belgrade,” he said. “What happened in Kosovo is not their fault. These are the people who, by and large, helped overthrow Milosevic.”

Kosovo’s ethnic Albanians, who make up more than 90 percent of the province, “also have a responsibility,”

Fried said. "They have to treat the Serb minority population better than they were treated. ... They claim the right of independence, and in our view, independence has to be earned and has to be based on their achieving and making commitments to achieving European norms."

TURKEY'S BID FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

The United States also supports Turkey's quest for membership in the European Union, but Fried said the decision is Europe's to make, and Turkey must meet the democratic and economic criteria for membership.

He acknowledged that many Europeans have concerns about such a large Muslim population joining the European Union.

"The Turks will say democratic norms are consistent with Islam," Fried said. Turkey also views itself not as an Islamic country but as a secular republic with an Islamic tradition, he said.

"Now can you imagine the potential upside?" Fried asked. If an economically successful, democratic Turkey joined Europe, it would send a powerful message to the world that Islam can embrace democracy, he said.

The enlargement of the European Union has been "a great success, and [Europeans] should recognize this and let the Turks measure up" to the qualifications for EU membership, Fried said.

"What you're seeing in Turkey is a democratizing society, and a growing culture of democracy colliding with a lot of the old more authoritarian traditions," Fried said. "It's moving in the right direction, but you're absolutely right. It's the Turks' responsibility [to qualify for the EU]. No free ride, no lowering the bar, no moving the goal posts."

For additional information on U.S. policy, see Europe and Eurasia:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/index.html>

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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